

State of the City Address
Mayor Shane T. Bemis
March 12, 2013

[City of Gresham Video](#)

Council President Echols, thank you for that very kind introduction.

Members of the Gresham City Council, elected leaders, citizens, City employees, and friends of Gresham, thank you for being here today for the 2013 State of the City Address.

First and foremost, I want to offer a huge thank you to the Gresham High School Overtones for such an outstanding rendition of the National Anthem, and to our local VFW Post 180 for presenting the colors, and for being such a positive force in our community.

Speaking of people who are tremendous forces in our community, it is my pleasure to honor my partners on the City Council, including Council President Karylenn Echols, and veteran Councilors Josh Fuhrer and Lori Stegmann. Along with some of the “old guard,” we’ve got a few tremendous new Councilors, who I’d like to introduce you to, if you haven’t met them already.

Councilor Mike McCormick has been in the community since 1957, and brings a great background in public safety as a retired Portland firefighter. A Gresham boy, he grew up in Rockwood and attended Centennial High School. He brings an outstanding depth of knowledge and experience in the community to the Council.

Councilor Jerry Hinton also has a nice tenure in the community, and brings some great business chops to the Council as the general manager of Brasher’s Auto Auction. Prior to being elected to Council, Councilor Hinton served on our Finance Committee, so we will also benefit from his background in that very important area.

Councilor Mario Palmero brings a particular interest in the Rockwood area, and he has immediately provided a valuable voice and perspective in our Council deliberations. We are lucky to have his breadth of knowledge and experience on the City Council.

Please give a warm welcome to all of our City Councilors.

You can learn an awful lot about the health of an organization by gauging the cooperation of its policy-making board. I could probably point at a few regional examples of dysfunctional policy boards hinting at dysfunctional government agencies, but something tells me you’ve already got them in mind. What I can say is that if you’ve been to a recent Gresham City Council meeting, you would see a respectful, deliberative, cooperative team. That doesn’t mean we’ll always agree on every issue, but it does mean that we will respect each other, and always lead with our hearts for the community.

I also want to thank some special guests here today:

- *Thank other elected officials
- *Thank City Manager Erik Kvarsten
- *Thank family

If you have been to one of my State of the City speeches in the past, you are probably familiar with our particular approach to this event. Frankly this is the venue I use to give a clear, unbiased, plainspoken account of the health of our community, and the challenges and opportunities that face the City of Gresham. In the past that has meant some hard words on community safety and crime, on revenue and the economy, and on what it is that we hold to be our core values in this community.

It has also meant celebrating Gresham, in all of her diverse and unique manifestations. We have celebrated our Art Walks and Teddy Bear Parades, our pioneer roots and rugged individualism, and we have celebrated our tremendous volunteers and the many, many hours that they selflessly give to their neighbors.

Let me tell you, striking that balance between hard truths and exciting causes for optimism isn't easy, and I think that, due to the economy and the significant revenue challenges we face, all of us have erred on the side of hard truths these past few years.

Forgive me if this year's discussion leans ever so slightly towards optimism and good news, because frankly, that's what I am seeing in our community right now. When people see growth and optimism in the future, they invest in it, and right now that investment is happening in our community.

In last year's State of the City Address, we talked about Gresham's revenue struggles, caused by our uniquely low permanent property tax rate. We laid out the entirety of the problem for the community, and discussed how, one way or another, we would need to take action in the year to come.

Well, I'm happy to report that we did. Last fall the City proposed a Police, Fire and Parks service fee, and went to the public in a series of five town hall meetings. I sent a letter explaining the need to every utility account holder in Gresham, and the City devoted the entire fall newsletter to the topic. Between town halls and City Council meetings, we had 10 public sessions dedicated to the fee, and the proposal changed significantly based on the feedback we heard from the public.

An across-the-board service fee was not our first choice, nor did it come easily. But at town hall after town hall, I watched our neighbors come to terms with the magnitude of the issue, accept collective ownership, roll up their sleeves, and make it better.

At our first town hall meeting, we had one gentleman show up with a large sign and a stack of interesting literature. He stood outside the door, making contact with those who entered, sharing his written material. Let's just say that this guy made Grover Norquist look like a San Francisco liberal.

While he hated our guts, at least initially, I will point out that he was, on balance, pretty friendly.

I chatted him up a bit before and after the forum, and he let us know that he'd be traveling to all five of our town halls to protest outside.

Our second town hall meeting was at Springwater Trail High School, and sure enough, our friend showed up again with his protest sign and stack of literature to share. He initially said that he'd be protesting outside again, but chilled by the wind, he came into the room to warm up. A couple minutes after I had started my presentation, he made his way to the very front row and plopped down.

As members of the public wrestled through the City's revenue challenge with each other, some opposing the measure, others supporting it, our friend joined the conversation with his own concerns. I probably spoke less at this forum than any other, because the conversation transformed from a question-and-answer type of exchange to a direct dialogue between members of the public, each bringing different perspectives, and wrestling through the best way to keep our fire stations open and our police officers patrolling our streets.

At the end of the forum, as we were clearing the room and packing up our stuff, the protester made his way over to our City Recorder and began discussing the issue. He described his concerns, again, and then he did something amazing. He said that, despite his hesitation, the Police and Fire needs had become abundantly clear to him, and that he had become a supporter. Sure enough, we didn't see him at any other town hall meetings. In the course of an evening, he transformed from our most vocal, passionate critic to a reluctant proponent.

I'd like to take credit for part of that change of heart, but at the end of the day, we probably have Gresham's frigid east wind to thank, driving him inside for the forum.

While the journey for many may not have been quite so extreme, at forum after forum we watched the community wrestle to balance their appropriate reluctance to pay more with their desire for core services. The most common refrain as people testified was their staggering tenure in Gresham. It was not at all uncommon to hear people describe living in the community for 25 years, 35 years, or even 50 or more years. The core element of our community, often silent but always vigilant, was coming out in force, and I knew that something important was taking place.

By the end of the process, we were hearing that the fee needed to be temporary and capped, and that a levy could be a good way to ultimately replace it with more stable revenue. We were hearing that we needed to have some provisions for low-income residents, and we were hearing that very large businesses needed to be involved in the revenue solution to a greater extent. We adjusted our proposal to accommodate those prudent points, and proceeded to adoption.

Again, while I will never celebrate asking my neighbors to come up with more money, I will absolutely celebrate the maturity and civility with which our community approached the issue. Even the heated exchanges at the forums were largely respectful, and I can say without hesitation that I don't think many other communities could approach an issue like this quite like Gresham did. If Congress could cooperate even a sliver as productively as our residents did during the fee process, we would be sailing at full speed with bipartisanship, respect, and a dual commitment to do what is right and not dodge hard decisions just because they are hard, or because their

colleagues have Rs or Ds behind their names.

I told you that this year's speech would speak more to the optimism and momentum in our community than to topics like revenue, but I will say that while you get this year off, next year at this time we will once again be heavily engaged as a community in mapping out a path that keeps our services whole.

In addition to the outstanding spirit of civility and cooperation that the community demonstrated during the revenue town halls, another factor warmed my heart. In the course of 10 public meetings, with many, many residents offering testimony and remarks, there were almost no qualitative complaints about our Police, Fire, or Parks services raised in the course of the discussion. That is to say, the one thing that nearly every person agreed on was the quality of service provided by our absolutely outstanding public servants.

You could travel the state and not find another community with such unanimous agreement about public safety service quality. To our outstanding police officers and firefighters in attendance today, thank you for working so hard to make that true. We are extremely fortunate to have you serving our community.

We often don't do enough to tell the public about the amazing work that these individuals perform each and every day. Fortunately this speech gives me the opportunity to share just a couple of examples of their tremendous work.

At our very first revenue town hall last fall, we had a citizen show up and speak first-hand to the value of our Fire and Emergency Services. He had suffered a heart attack and, as he put it, essentially died, in downtown Gresham. A bystander called 9-1-1, and our emergency personnel rushed to the scene, performed CPR, got the gentleman stabilized, and sent off to the hospital. To put it more bluntly, they saved his life.

Bill Hay is with us tonight because our emergency responders were there when he needed them the most. Mr. Hay, could you please stand?

Bill is just one example of why the services these men and women provide are so critical. It's also worth noting that, since his life-altering event, Bill has consistently given back to the City of Gresham through many, many hours of volunteer service.

That event was not an anomaly. While we certainly don't have a successful outcome every time, we do more often than most. You may have heard me say before that Gresham has one of the highest cardiac arrest survival rates in the nation. That is a direct result of our outstanding, professional, well-trained Fire and Emergency Service personnel. Some of them are here tonight. Please stand and be recognized for your outstanding contribution to the residents of Gresham.

That account, while exemplary of the outstanding service our firefighters and emergency responders provide, is just an example of one call for service. Last year alone, Gresham Fire and Emergency Services responded to nearly 14,000 calls for service.

On the police side, there is no single incident that better exemplifies the dedication, courage, and dogged persistence that the men and women in our Police Department provide than the tragic Whitney Heichel investigation last year.

I have never in my life seen so many people immediately commit to a mission and take their jobs more personally than I did over the course of that tragic week last fall. There was not a person in our Police Department, sworn or civilian, who was not giving everything they had to solve that case. Our entire community rallied around that tragic situation, and we came together in our grief and sadness.

Our police officers worked around the clock chasing down leads and tips, and demonstrated incredible dedication and intuition, identifying a key suspect, and successfully making an arrest. That suspect now awaits trial, and faces justice thanks to the work of our officers and a watchful, caring, vigilant community.

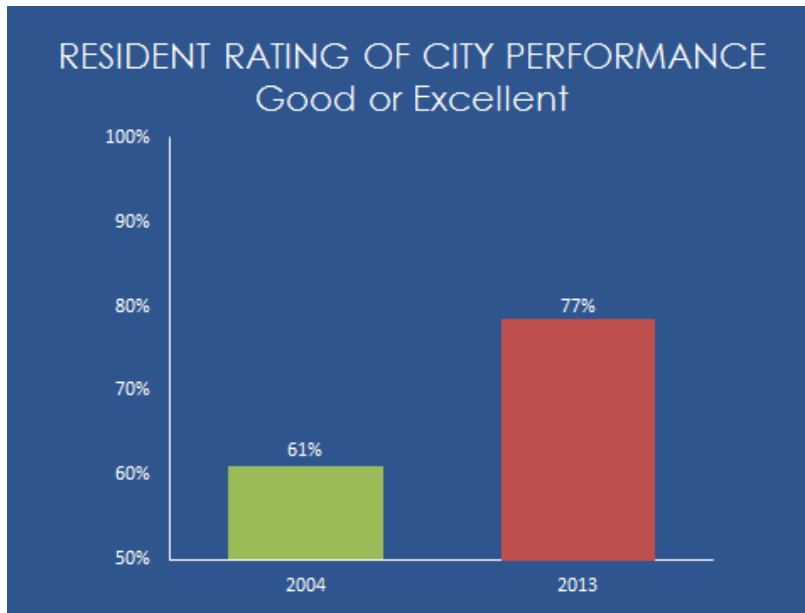
As a community, Gresham cried together over the course of that perilous week, and mourned the embodiment of our humanity at its worst. In many ways, Whitney represented all of our wives, daughters, sisters, friends and loved ones as we watched the investigation unfold. I am hard-pressed to think of a more heinous situation than the tragedy surrounding Whitney, and it hurts to this day to imagine that human beings are capable of such evil. For as long as I live, I will be haunted by that memory, and our thoughts and prayers remain with Whitney's family.

The Whitney Heichel case was one major event in a year that brought the Gresham Police Department 73,000 calls for service. Our ranks are thin, and our officers are incredibly busy. Would the members of our Police Department who are here tonight stand and be recognized for your commitment to the safety of our residents?

Our employees, across the board, have worked tremendously hard to serve the public and protect the bottom line. When we put out bids to replace the roof at the City's Operations Center, the prices came in higher than we had anticipated. Looking at the bids, our own facilities employees asked to have a chance to put together a proposal to fix the roof themselves. Sure enough, their number was more favorable than the others, and they completed the project themselves, saving the city \$10,000.

The Operations Center roof is just one small example of the daily, ordinary, hard work our City employees bring to the table to help us continually do more with less. You probably don't hear about the City's investment officers very often. They are kind of like NASA engineers: The only time you hear about them is when something terrible has happened.

Well, I want to change that just a bit tonight. Anybody with some background in finance and investing knows how hard it is to find safe, high-yield investments in today's market. I'm happy to report that our investment staff has done tremendously well relative to our peers, finding an investment return rate better than Hillsboro, Salem, Eugene, Washington County and Multnomah County. Just small swings in the return mean big impacts on the bottom line, to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars.



It is easy for me to stand up here as the Mayor and say that I am proud of the job we are doing at the City because I see it every day. But I also know that you, the community, are seeing it as well. In a 2004 community survey, 61 percent of Gresham residents said that they would rate the performance of the City as “pretty good” or “excellent.” Fast-forward, and in a similar survey last summer, 77 percent of Gresham residents said they would rate the performance of the City as “good” or

“excellent.” Now I’m not going to stand here and tell you that I’m satisfied with a C+, but I will say that a 16-point climb should make us all proud of the progress we are making.

Organizational culture is incredibly hard to change, and trust is even harder to build, and all of this occurred in a climate where overall perceptions of government seem to be moving hard in the opposite direction.

During the State of the City, we often take time to recognize the tremendous work of City employees, but I don’t want to miss the opportunity to recognize the tremendous work of our community as well. Over the past several years, Gresham’s annual Art Walk has slowly grown into one of our highest-profile, signature events. There are many people who play a role in that event, but there is one person who steps up, year after year, to make it happen. The work is often thankless, and she does it out of a passion for her community, with very little personal gain from her labor.

Judy started Art Walk over a decade ago as a way to create community and build activity by drawing people downtown. Today, we have 10,000 people flood into Gresham’s downtown every summer, complete with many vendors. It’s a tremendous day for Gresham.

Judy is here tonight. Judy, would you please stand so that we can thank you for all that you do in the community?



While super-volunteers like Judy step up and help deliver the major events that create Gresham's vibrancy, we have thousands of others in the community who each day give a little bit of their time and effort to make Gresham better.

Just in the past year the City had 2,600 volunteers contribute more than 14,000 hours to our City. For perspective, that represents nearly seven full-time employees' worth of volunteer time for the City. If you have volunteered for the City of Gresham in the past few years, please stand and be recognized. Thank you for your service.

You may have noticed our six City Councilors standing a moment ago. It's worth noting that the Mayor and City Council serve as volunteers, giving many, many hours to the City we love.



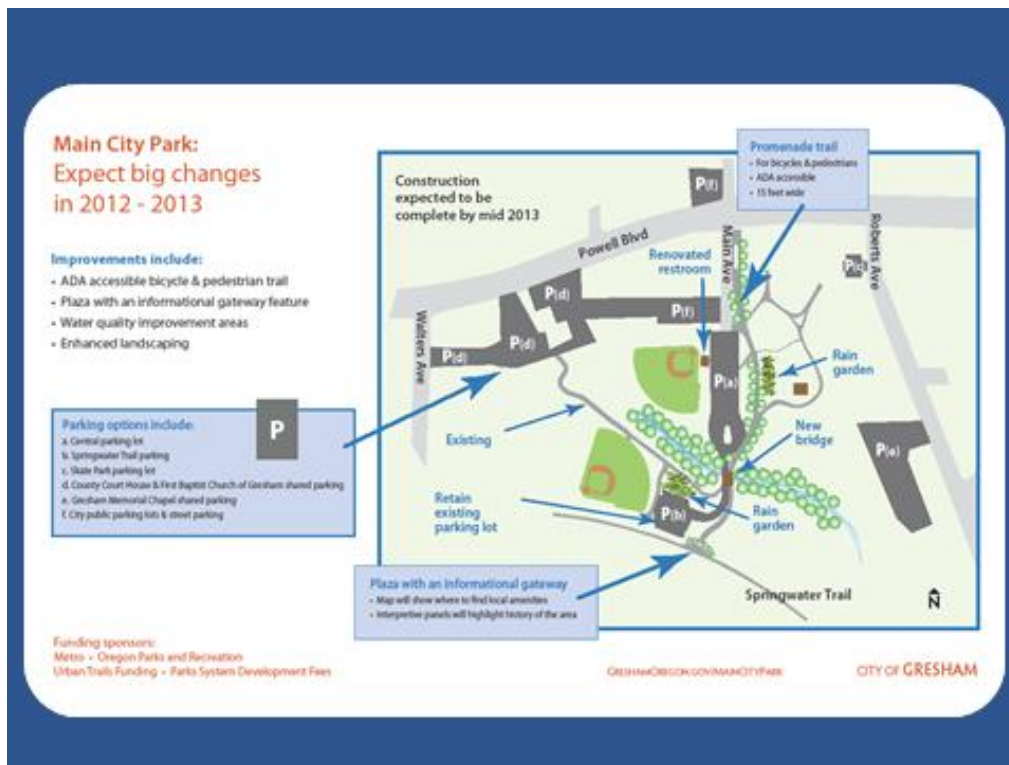
The spirit of helping others is also on the rise in Gresham, and we are seeing evidence of that in two of our highest-profile non-profit organizations. Both SnowCap and My Father's House are expanding their operations. SnowCap is making room for more food storage and freezer space to help feed our hungriest citizens. Nearby, the "Stepping Stone" addition at My Father's House is slated to help meet the needs of single-mother families.

Tremendous women run both these organizations, and their names have almost become synonymous with their brands. Could Judy Alley and Cathe Wiese please stand and be recognized for all that you do in our community?

SnowCap and My Father's House are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the investments we are seeing in our safety net agencies. The Good News Clinic is looking at an expansion of the healthcare services it provides in Rockwood, and Human Solutions recently wrapped up their awesome new facility.

In addition, out of the devastating recent news that the PAL Center in Rockwood would be closing its doors came the very exciting news that the Boys and Girls Club and Friends of Children were gearing up to step in, fill the void, and invest in a whole new facility in the area. We are extremely excited to see the impact that these partners will have on this critical neighborhood.

Along with these agencies, the City is also in the midst of some exciting investments. You may have noticed that some changes are afoot in Main City Park, the City's flagship public space. We are making trailhead improvements that will better connect the Springwater Trail with our blossoming downtown, and improving the flow of people throughout the park. If you haven't been through recently, go by and take a look.



I'm also pleased to announce that the City will be formally dedicating a new trailhead to honor Gresham's iconic former Mayor, Gussie McRobert, who passed away last year. Gussie was a tiger when it came to supporting Gresham's parks and open spaces, and though we already miss her greatly, it will be wonderful for the thousands of bicyclists, walkers and park users to see a physical manifestation of her legacy in the heart of our city.



Another nearby park is also poised for new excitement. We are drawing closer to constructing Gresham's place-making Children's Fountain at the Arts Plaza, an amenity that will help program our newest park, and our downtown, with families, children and energy.

The original concept for this park included a fountain, and we anticipate that it will be a terrific, free place for families with young kids to recreate in the summer, and will improve the overall downtown aesthetic at other points during the year. We also anticipate that investments like this in our key areas of the City will continue to help attract new, valuable development and business activity, rising the tide for the whole community.



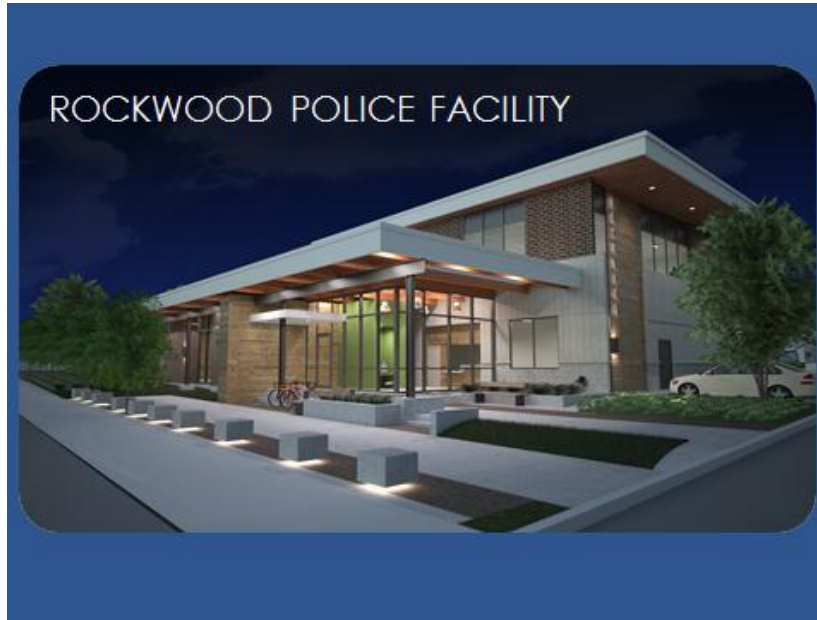
Of course, finding the resources for this investment was not easy. We absolutely did not want to use revenue that could otherwise be spent on critical core services like Police and Fire, so instead we got creative. The City will be using federal Community Development Block Grant dollars to fund the project. We traditionally use a portion of these federal funds for capital improvement projects, so the fountain was a good fit, and we will be able to fund its construction without General Fund resources, which go largely to Police and Fire.

I'm not naive to the fact that building a fountain isn't the easiest political choice in the world, and there will certainly be those who say that we shouldn't go "big" on projects like this. But I think it's OK for us to think bigger than that, and look for these types of creative opportunities to be a generation of builders, always looking forward and asking what we can do to nurture community investments.

We could sit back and never push forward for amenities and investments, and sure, at the end of the day we could save a few bucks and avoid a few uncomfortable criticisms. But in the long run, what does that get us? I think we are all probably extremely grateful that our parents and grandparents didn't think that way, instead leaving us an inheritance of colleges, hospitals, beautiful parks, pristine protected buttes and open spaces.

We made the concerted decision tonight to hold this event at Mount Hood Community College, one prime examples of our community making investments. You know, when the Mount Hood Community College proposal went to voters in 1965, it prevailed with over 80 percent of the vote.

Along with the improvements to Main City Park and the Arts Plaza, just last week we celebrated the groundbreaking for the Rockwood Police Facility, launching a nine-month construction effort that will deliver on an integral part of the Rockwood Urban Renewal Plan after many years of anticipation. This facility will provide a highly visible, attractive-looking police presence in a crucial area of our city.



In addition to the new Police facility, much is afoot in Rockwood. The Rockwood Community Development Corporation is gaining momentum in their plan to help bring local housing, grocery options and social services to Rockwood, all with the vision of improving self-sufficiency and opportunity.

Speaking of opportunity, there is momentum building in Rockwood around the concept of “opportunity communities,”

which help pair people in poverty with volunteers who can help, bringing mentorship and access to services to people at their personal and unique points of need on a very individual level. Through this personal relationship and individual attention, much progress can be made in not only transforming the area, but in transforming the lives within it.

And as we celebrate these exciting developments, we also know that the City is the owner of one prime redevelopment site in Rockwood, where the former Fred Meyer building sat. We will continue to work closely with the development community to find the best option for that site and for the neighborhood, but I can also assure you that we have no intention of settling for substandard apartments or overbuilt retail. Rockwood has character and history, and has a ton to offer. As Mayor, I patently refuse the premise that the neighborhood cannot prosper. We are seeing too much momentum across the board to even begin to believe that. Too many people are investing too much of their time, too much of their talent, and too much of their hearts and souls to sell this area short.

These investments in our non-profit sector and in City facilities and property mirror the investments we are seeing in the rest of the community. I’ve spoken at length in the past about the successes of our Garage-to-Storefront program, which was every bit as simple in its inception as it has been effective in its implementation.

Staring down the barrel of the worst economy of our lifetimes, we asked what we could do to help grow new investment in the community. As we wracked our minds for ideas, it occurred to us that the best way we could help our entrepreneurs set up shop was to get out of their way. We said that if you wanted to open up a new or expanding small business in Gresham’s key

commercial areas, you would not owe the City a dime for water and sewer hook-up fees, parks system development charges, business licenses or transportation fees. Zero, nada, nothing.

By the way, our incentive program came with a dedicated person at City Hall to help our entrepreneurs through the process, bringing them along from the moment they pulled their first permits to the moment they first pulled the chain on the open sign.

Well, after the initial year and two renewals, the program has finally come to an incredibly successful end. In total, we had 144 new or expanding businesses open up, filling more than 225,000 square feet of previously vacant, blighted storefronts.

I could go on at length about the positive impact this program has had on our business community, but I thought it might be better for you to hear directly from Dwight Unti, a commercial property owner in Gresham who has seen the transformation that has taken place.

[Dwight Unti Video](#)

As you heard from Dwight, the investments these businesses have made have helped alter the fabric of the community. They have added vibrancy and activity, and we owe a huge debt of gratitude to all of the entrepreneurs and businesspeople in our community.

Our medium-sized and larger enterprises are also on the rise. In a room filled with active community leaders and involved citizens, there probably aren't many people who are not aware of the awesome community spirit at places like Riverview Community Bank and Gresham Ford. Both of these tremendous businesses made investments this past year, with Riverview opening a Gresham branch, and Gresham Ford setting up a whole new shop and putting even deeper roots in the Gresham community.

Riverview was just one of five banks to open up new branches in Gresham in the past two years. I have heard it said that banks are a good bellwether for future growth, because they don't invest in areas that don't show great potential. I'd say one or two would hint at good news to come, but approaching a half-dozen starts to tell a story about the positive growth that lies ahead for Gresham.

On the industrial front, the past year has again given us cause for optimism, as many of our major employers have undergone another round of substantial investment. 2012 brought us the opening of Organically Grown Corporation, with 124 employees and \$7 million in new investment, and we saw Boeing of Gresham start another round of investment, which we helped spark with an Enterprise Zone approval last month.

ON Semiconductor was another point of success, starting another round of investment, just like Boeing. And of course, ON Semiconductor is adjacent to the largest single shovel-ready industrial site in the region, Gresham Vista Industrial Park, and we have worked actively with our partners at the Port of Portland to recruit the right companies for that important location.

Together, over the past five years these two major employers have added 500 new jobs in their

Gresham plants.

We are fortunate to not be alone in these economic development recruitments. Along with our partners at the State of Oregon and the Port of Portland, we enjoy a fantastic relationship with the East Metro Economic Alliance, which is a great, united voice for the business community in East County, and helps us speak to the virtues of doing business here in Gresham.

In addition to these higher profile recruitments and expansions, Gresham actually pushed through the recession with a critical mass of smaller-scale victories. Despite the last five recessionary years and a very slow recovery, the City of Gresham's industrial space has seen significant infill.

Right before the recession hit, five new speculative industrial parks were built in Gresham, with a total of more than 765,000 square feet of space. Today, I am happy to report that four of the five parks are fully leased, with the fifth one very near full capacity. Since 2008, at least 17 new companies, with more than 600 employees, have moved into these five business parks.

These business investments, be they small businesses or major industrial manufacturers, are doubling-down on Gresham. They are buying a hot stock, and are poised to profit from an era of growth and prosperity.

In addition to the investments being made by our businesses, small and large, we are also starting to see a new trend emerge in Gresham: Young families with the opportunity to live anywhere in the region are making a conscious decision to choose Gresham.

We have suffered from others using our challenges to define us for so long that I think we may have started to forget how much we have to offer.

Young families want to live in a place that still has some grit and culture, some diversity and an edge. They want to have Main Streets with local merchants, and commercial areas with vibrant livability. They want large lots and yards, and a lot more house for their dollars. They want recreation options, parks, trails and natural areas.

Gresham has every single quality on that list, and people are taking notice. Right now you're thinking, "Oh, Shane, we know you love Gresham, but don't try to pretend like we're the next Mississippi Avenue or something." I tell you what, I don't have any aspiration to see Gresham become the next Mississippi Avenue, complete with unicycle jugglers and double-decker bikes, but I do think a family renaissance of sorts is underway. Take, for example, the Landolt family, which moved here in 2012:

[Landolt Family Video](#)

The Landolts picked Gresham because it offers value, family amenities, and a sense of community better than our neighbors. But they aren't the only ones who are seeing the promise in Gresham and making investments. Let me introduce you to the Kogas:

Koga Family Video

Did you hear that? Jared assessed the region, and chose Gresham because this is the place that he saw growth and opportunity. The families in these videos represent what we have going for us, and speak to the amenities, community feel, events, festivals, and human capital we have in Gresham. The numbers are encouraging. In each of the past two years, we had more residential real estate transactions in Gresham than we did in the roaring year of 2007.

The Landolts and Kogas are here tonight. Could you please stand and let us give you a warm welcome to Gresham?

People want to raise their kids in a place where the graduation rate in the Gresham-Barlow School District is about 10 percent higher than the state average, and the best in Multnomah County. The nearby Centennial School district is home to Kevin Ricker at Centennial High School who was honored as the state's Principal of the Year.

They want to invest in a place that has a Springwater Trail for family bike rides.

They want to invest in a place that offers a Teddy Bear parade, and a blooming business environment.

While I firmly believe that Gresham is on the rise, I also want us to be purposeful in helping that rising tide continue. It has been a very long time, perhaps dating back to our parents' generation, since this community has sat down together to ask what we can do to help Gresham – this place we love – thrive, as opposed to discussing which areas require cuts and disinvestment.

I want to convene a group to start mapping out some of these opportunities for community investment and amenities. Now relax, you know me well enough by now to know that I'm not proposing a three-year, Metro-esque visioning process, complete with pastels and dot exercises.

I want to convene a group of community partners to finally, collectively, ask: What is it that Gresham needs? We are a community of over 100,000 people, with a very diverse, urban population. It's not just ok to ask what our modern city requires, we have an obligation to do so. Is it a community center? More activity for youth? A Trader Joe's or a Macy's? Better parks or ball fields? More education infrastructure? The first step to making the community a better place is getting together and dreaming a little, and I want to do just that.

In the coming weeks and months, we will begin convening this group, and all are welcome. If you want to be part of an effort to grab hold of the momentum we are seeing and the positive spirit we have in Gresham, we want you on the team. Shoot me an email, a letter, or a phone call, or send me a note on my Mayor's page on Facebook. I can't tell you exactly where this process will go, but I can say without hesitation that it is long overdue.

There are plenty of reasons why we can't build something, restore something, invest in something, create something out of nothing. I'm familiar with every single one of those reasons, and, trust me, we spend plenty of time dwelling on them. But, at the same time, scanning this

room, I see hundreds of reasons why we can build, we can restore, we can invest, and we can create new community.

I guess what I am trying to say is that I'm pretty done hearing about the obstacles we face, and I suspect you may be done hearing about those too. So if you want to very purposefully pivot the conversation, transition the dialogue and start a new narrative, I'm ready to grab hold of that effort and run.

Through efforts like this, we will once again take the reins of our community and steer it in a specific direction forward.

There is no question that the state of our city is surging. It is indeed a time of investment in Gresham right now, and I believe firmly that our community is ready to go.

We are investing in our children, and the possibilities that only they could imagine.

I saw that investment firsthand last August, as the youngsters on the Gresham Nationals Little League team accomplished a task, so lofty in magnitude, that only they could have possibly conceived of it.



As they moved from their regular season to the District II competition, and from there on to the State Championship, and the Northwest Regional Championship, the community began to take notice.

We knew these kids were good, but we had no idea that they were this good! They played their hearts out in the Northwest Regional Championship, and lo and behold, they won the thing!

Do you know what a victory in the Northwest Regional Championship gets you? That's right, a

berth in the hallowed Little League World Series in South Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

Now, I've been to South Williamsport, and let me tell you, what it lacks in urban amenities, it makes up for in pixie dust. That magical place might as well have been Never Never Land for these young men.

The Gresham Nationals did their job, making us proud and representing the very best in our community. They earned their World Series berth through their play, but let me tell you, it took a village to get their families there to enjoy the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity with them.

The Gresham Nationals are here tonight. Could you please stand and be recognized by your community?

We, as a community, came together and invested in these tremendous young men and their dream, and their amazing accomplishments. We bought stock in each and every one of them, because they showed us that optimism and believing in the inconceivable is the path to success. We held fundraisers and barbeques and passed the hat, and our business community stepped up, as it so often does, to close the gap and help those families join their boys so that on Little League's biggest stage they could look up from the batter's box and see their moms and dads beaming with pride.

You don't see that kind of investment in communities that don't have promise, and optimism, and spirit. Gresham is brimming with chance and hope, and investment is happening all around us.

We are investing in services, as we saw during the community revenue discussion last fall.

We are seeing new families, like the Landolts and Kogas, picking Gresham over other cities in the region and investing in homes and businesses.

We are seeing the 144 entrepreneurs who accessed our Garage-to-Storefront program investing in Gresham and putting out open signs in key areas of our city.

We have spent too many years letting others define us instead of telling our own tremendously positive story. Optimists make investments, and those investments should lead us as we set about assessing the state of our fine city.

Make the next two-dozen conversations you have about Gresham reflect the wonderful elements we have going for us here. As Mayor, I have the opportunity to visit communities across the state, and here's a little secret about each one of them: they have issues. We all do.

The difference is in the narrative, and we get a hand in how we choose to tell our story. Make the conscious decision tonight to be an optimist. Dwell on the positive –not because we are ignoring the areas in which we need to improve –I've certainly never been one to shirk away from identifying our challenges. But while those issues exist, we can't forget that we've got a great thing going here. Consciously choose to be part of that positive story.

Let me tell you, I've been in this community for most of my life, and as a business owner and elected leader, I feel like I am qualified to observe that Gresham, as a community, is prudently tight with the pocketbook. But at the same time, this community never misses a great investment opportunity, and rises to the occasion every time to be part of the momentum for the future.

I hope that by now you know that I'm a guy who gives it to you straight. I wouldn't stand up here and tell you that it is time to put the doom and gloom of the past few years of economic struggle behind us if I didn't believe, emphatically, that we are emerging from the economic muck with a full head of steam.

I wouldn't stand up here and tell you that the time is right now to start talking about how we want to make our city better if I didn't think that the community was ready to move with the vision.

I wouldn't introduce you to the Kogas and Landolts if I didn't think that you were starting to see the same movement of families choosing Gresham for many of the same reasons.

We've got a great energy building here, and now is the time to leave negativity and gloom at the door, because I'm telling you, together we are going to surge.

Gresham has so much potential, and so much going for it. We have been dealt a sweet hand, with our historic roots, family orientation, and close access to all of the things that make Oregon special.

It is a tremendous honor to serve as your Mayor, and I am constantly humbled by the many, many dedicated people who are doing so much in so many areas of our community.

There is no question that our city is on the move, and I'm personally committed as your Mayor to grab every last bit of that momentum and double it. But I won't – I can't – do it without you. Are you with me?